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Directions in historiography Our island story? Towards a transnational history of late modern Ireland

The besetting sin of all historical writing is myopia. Large as well as small nations suffer equally from the disheartening insularity of rarely looking beyond the borders of the nation state as geographical borders mutate into mental, cultural and historiographical ones. Myopia's close relative is the unshakeable doctrine of exceptionalism: the assumption that each nation's history is, by definition, *sui generis*. National histories written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fostered notions of a shared identity and created the sense of an embryonic nation. A critical element in this process was stressing the exceptional characteristics, such as the tradition of liberal governance in Britain, American liberty or the revolutionary origins of the French state.¹ That this history of nations was presented for popular consumption as a story is understandable – story-telling is the most effective method of communicating a narrative to a wide audience. In the case of Ireland, there is a long tradition of presenting its history as a story, more often as a morality tale.² The precocious mobilisation of Irish nationalism in the early nineteenth century added weight to such viewpoints. Older variants invariably have a teleological feel, a Whig-like progression towards that inevitable end point of a fully formed Irish nation – even if the nation state that emerged in 1921–2 fell short of nationalist aspirations.³ In the dedication of his book to his comrades Bulmer Hobson and Robert Lynd, P. S. O'Hegarty memorably described his lively chronicle of Ireland under the Union as 'the story of a people coming out of captivity, out of the underground, finding every artery of national life occupied by her enemy, recovering them one by one, and coming out at last in the full blaze of the sun'.⁴ At least no one could accuse O'Hegarty of concealing his intentions.

As with all stories, what is left out is of equal interest. Historians of late modern Ireland have unconsciously constructed an 'island story', with its central focus on domestic events.⁵ 'Late modern' is taken to designate the period after the Union

¹ Stefan Berger with Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore, 'Apologias for the nation-state in western Europe since 1800' in Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore (eds), *Writing national histories: western Europe since 1800* (London, 1999), pp 9–10; Peter Mandler, *History and national life* (London, 2002).

² See R. F. Foster, *The Irish story: telling tales and making it up in Ireland* (London, 2001), pp 1–22.

³ For an original interpretation, see Patrick O'Mahony and Gerard Delanty, *Rethinking Irish history: nationalism, identity and ideology* (London, 1998).

⁴ P. S. O'Hegarty, *A history of Ireland under the Union, 1801–1922* (London, 1952), dedication.

⁵ This, of course, refers to the title of the classic history of England for children by

and is widely agreed to constitute a distinctive phase in Irish history.⁶ True, the existence of Irish diaspora has been acknowledged, if then just as swiftly ignored. Historians chart the causes and extent of emigration in synthetic surveys, but the coverage invariably ends with the tearful farewells at Irish ports.⁷ It is not too much of a rhetorical flourish to argue that the ten million migrants who left Ireland have been doubly marginalised: first by the society they left, and then by subsequent historians in Ireland. They have inadvertently been left in a curious state of purgatory; as Patrick O'Farrell commented, as far back as 1976, having 'fallen into the gap between the study of the country which he [*sic*] has left, and the study of the country to which he has come ... [h]e seems irrelevant to what he has left behind, and foreign to what he has come to join.'⁸ On leaving Ireland, migrants become the preserve of another sphere of historiography, that of immigration and ethnic history, whether this be in the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia or New Zealand. In the global field of migration history, the Irish diaspora is widely seen as one of the most vigorous original areas of historical inquiry, establishing new methodologies and displaying a high degree of analytical sophistication. This discussion seeks to complement recent debates among historians of the Irish diaspora, but it does so by adopting an altogether different focus.⁹ The primary

H. E. Marshall, *Our island story: a history of England for boys and girls* (London, 1905), republished many times, most recently in a new edition in 2007.

⁶ Oliver MacDonagh, 'Introduction: Ireland and the Union, 1801–70', in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union, i (1801–70)* (Oxford, 1989), xlvii–lxv; idem, *Ireland: the Union and its aftermath* (rev. ed., London, 1970), pp 13–32.

⁷ An exception here is R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (London, 1988), which devoted a separate chapter to 'Ireland abroad', pp 345–72, the only major long-range survey of late modern Ireland to do so. Others, such as Paul Bew, *Ireland: the politics of enmity, 1789–2006* (Oxford, 2009), K. T. Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (2nd ed., London, 1998), and Alvin Jackson, *Ireland, 1798–1998: war, peace and beyond* (2nd ed., Oxford, 2010) discuss migration and the Irish overseas but always as a secondary concern to the primary political narrative.

⁸ Patrick O'Farrell, 'Emigrant attitudes and behaviour as a source for Irish history' in G. A. Hayes-McCoy (ed.), *Historical studies x: papers read before the 11th Irish Conference of Historians* (Dublin, 1976), p. 116.

⁹ D. H. Akenson, 'Stepping back and looking around' in David A. Wilson (ed.), *Irish nationalism in Canada* (Kingston & Montreal, 2009), pp 178–89; David Brundage, 'Recent directions in the history of Irish American nationalism' in *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 28, no. 4 (2009), pp 82–9; Enda Delaney, Kevin Kenny and Donald M. MacRaild, 'Symposium: perspectives on the Irish diaspora' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, 33 (2006), pp 35–52; David Noel Doyle, 'Cohesion and diversity in the Irish diaspora' in *I.H.S.*, xxxi, no. 123 (1999), pp 411–34; Patrick Fitzgerald and Brian Lambkin, *Migration in Irish history, 1607–2007* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp 3–15; Mary Hickman, 'Migration and diaspora' in Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (eds.), *The Cambridge companion to modern Irish culture* (Cambridge, 2005), pp 117–36; J. J. Lee, 'The Irish diaspora in the nineteenth century' in L. M. Geary and Margaret Kelleher (eds.), *Nineteenth century Ireland: a guide to recent research* (Dublin, 2005), pp 182–222; idem, 'Introduction: interpreting Irish America' in J. J. Lee and Marion R. Casey (eds.), *Making the Irish American: history and heritage of the Irish in the United States* (New York, 2006), pp 1–62; Kevin Kenny, 'Diaspora and comparison: the global Irish as a case study' in *Journal of American History*, 90, no. 1 (2003), pp 359–98; idem, 'Writing the history of the Irish diaspora' in Robert J. Savage, Jr., (ed.), *Ireland in the new century: politics, culture and identity* (Dublin, 2003), pp 206–26; idem 'Twenty years of Irish American historiography' in *Journal of*

purpose is to map out an alternative history of late modern Ireland that integrates the diaspora within Irish historical writing. This would involve a fundamental shift in focus for historians of late modern Ireland, from an older island-centric history to a more inclusive global one. It is argued here that the best way to do this is through the use of transnational analysis that investigates particular topics or themes across national boundaries. After briefly considering the current practices in the writing of history of late modern Ireland, a number of indicative examples of this transnational history are discussed. Finally, we consider the potential pitfalls of such an approach.

I

Table 1: *Population of Ireland (32 counties) and geographical distribution of Irish-born persons in the principal receiving societies, 1851–2001*

Year	Population of Ireland	Irish-born persons living in:				U.S., Can., Aust., G.B. total
		United States (U.S.)	Canada (Can.)	Australia (Aust.)	Britain (G.B.)	
1851	6,552,000	962,000	227,000	70,000	727,000	1,986,000
1871	5,412,000	1,856,000	223,000	214,000	775,000	3,068,000
1901	4,459,000	1,615,000	102,000	186,000	632,000	2,535,000
1921	4,354,000 ^(a)	1,037,000	93,000	106,000	524,000	1,760,000
1951	4,331,000	520,000	86,000	48,000	716,000	1,370,000
1971	4,514,000	291,000	38,000 ^(b)	64,000	957,000	1,350,000
2001	5,602,000	156,000	26,000 ^(b)	50,000	750,000	982,000

^(a) Estimated.

^(b) Data are only available for those born in independent Ireland.

Sources: Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948–1954, *Reports* (Dublin, [1955]), Pr. 2541, p. 126, table 95; National censuses, 1971 and 2001. Data are for those dates proximate to the stated years.

To say that Ireland was a small nation with a big diaspora is more accurate than this tired cliché might suggest. For every ten people born in Ireland after the Great Famine, at least three to four were destined to spend their lives in other countries (see table 1). As David Fitzpatrick has observed for the period of the Union, ‘growing up in Ireland meant preparing oneself to leave it’.¹⁰ A substantial proportion of every generation could never expect to live their lives in the country of their birth. To take the early 1870s as an example, of the nearly eight-and-a-half-million Irish-born, more than a third were living outside of Ireland. In European terms, this was an extraordinarily high level of outmigration. At the height of the exodus in the later nineteenth century, nearly as many people born in Ireland lived

American Ethnic History, 28, no. 4 (2009), pp 67–75; Janet Nolan, ‘Women’s place in the history of the Irish diaspora: a snapshot’ in *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 28, no. 4 (2009), pp 76–81; Timothy J. Meagher, *The Columbia guide to Irish American history* (New York, 2006), pp 214–33; idem, ‘From the world to the village and the beginning to the end and after: research opportunities in Irish American history’ in *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 28, no. 4 (2009), pp 122–7; Roger Swift, ‘Identifying the Irish in Victorian Britain: recent trends in historiography’ in *Immigrants & Minorities*, 27, nos. 2–3 (2009), pp 134–51.

¹⁰ David Fitzpatrick, *Irish emigration, 1801–1921* (Dublin, 1984), p. 30.

outside the country as lived in it. For instance, in 1910 the Irish-born population of New York City was just over a quarter of a million people; in Ireland itself, only the cities of Dublin and Belfast had larger numbers at this time.¹¹ If individuals did not leave, there was always a strong chance that, should circumstances dictate, they would have to do so. Even by the second half of the twentieth century, the likelihood of migration from Ireland remained a rite of passage for those coming of age, especially in the 1950s and 1980s.¹² Few societies were so profoundly shaped by emigration. Centuries of movement created huge ethnic populations in these receiving societies. Estimates of Irish descent are especially problematic, not least due to the influence of identity politics in multi-ethnic societies, and the volitional nature of ethnic self-identification on a census form. With this qualification in mind, roughly seventy million people worldwide now profess Irish ancestry, half of whom live in the U.S.¹³

What is less certain is the other side of the equation: how the existence of such large communities living outside of the country shaped the evolution of late modern Ireland? Over a quarter of a century ago, Fitzpatrick underlined the significance of emigration for understanding Irish society, and, equally, the imperative for historians to expand their horizons:

Emigration was also one of the great formative factors in modern Irish history. Without studying emigration, one could scarcely hope to explain Ireland's peculiar blend of archaism and modernity as manifested in its economy, demography, social structure and political culture. Majority emigration means, moreover, that the study of Irish history must not be limited to Ireland.¹⁴

Notwithstanding such exhortations to broaden the geographical scope of modern Irish history, what has emerged over time are two separate fields of historical writing: one covering the 'homeland', or domestic history, the other concerned with the 'diaspora', or migrant communities, and only rarely do these historiographies collide. Moving away from the binaries of domestic and diaspora histories, an alternative formulation is offered here: an integrated history that accords the Irish overseas and the Irish at home equal weighting, rather than privileging one group over another. It explores in a rudimentary way how the connections with

¹¹ Marian Casey, "'From the east side to the seaside': Irish Americans on the move in New York city" in Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (eds), *The New York Irish* (Baltimore, 1996), p. 396

¹² Enda Delaney, *Irish emigration since 1921* (Dublin, 2006), p. 7.

¹³ Cited in Mark Boyle and Rob Kitchen, 'Towards an Irish diaspora strategy: a position paper' (National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis working paper no. 37, NUI Maynooth, 2008), p. 3. For a fascinating recent treatment of Irish ancestry that lays special emphasis on the genealogical and genetic dimensions, see Catherine Nash, *Of Irish descent: origin stories, genealogy, and the politics of belonging* (Syracuse, 2008). For statistics of Irish descent in the U.S. in the 1990 census, see Michael Hout and Joshua R. Goldstein, 'How 4.5 million Irish immigrants became 40 million Irish Americans: demographic and subjective aspects of the ethnic composition of white Americans' in *American Sociological Review*, 59, no. 1 (1994), pp 64–82, and for Britain, Mary J. Hickman, Sarah Morgan and Bronwen Walter, *Second-generation Irish people in Britain: a demographic, socio-economic and health profile* (London, 2001). In the 2000 U.S. census, thirty-five million people claimed Irish or Scottish ancestry (Meagher, *Columbia guide to Irish American history*, p. 3).

¹⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Irish emigration*, p. 1.

this diaspora shaped both the history of the homeland and that of receiving societies. This would enable historians to begin to address one of the most complicated questions about late modern Ireland: to what extent did Irishness shape the political, social, economic and cultural behaviour of the diaspora and those at home? The writings of David Fitzpatrick and Kerby A. Miller on the Irish in Australia and the U.S. have demonstrated how being Irish shaped outlooks and world views, even if the conclusions arrived at suggest this occurred in very different ways in equally different contexts, but there is plenty of scope for more studies that investigate this vital issue.¹⁵

In anglophone as well as European historical writing, a distinctive emphasis on moving beyond the nation state emerged in the 1990s as historians of even very large countries such as the U.S. advocated the adoption of transnational histories.¹⁶ In Britain, this was most clearly seen in the interactions between two previously disconnected spheres, that of domestic history and of imperial and colonial history. Much of the best historical writing has sought to fuse these once far-removed worlds, following individuals, ideas and artefacts as they travelled across the Empire, and seeking to assess the impact of the Empire on modern Britain.¹⁷ From the early 1990s, there was a concerted effort to ‘internationalise’ American history, to look beyond the nation state, and to challenge the rather insular world view by placing the experience of the U.S. in a global context, and, in doing so, undermining notions of exceptionalism. What emerged from the myriad of debates was an emphasis on a transnational history that investigates interactions across national boundaries of people, goods, capital and ideas.¹⁸ Is this simply present-minded

¹⁵ David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of consolation: personal accounts of Irish migration to Australia* (Cornell, 1994); Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and exiles: Ireland and the Irish exodus to North America* (New York, 1985).

¹⁶ See Deborah Cohen and Maura O’Connor (eds), *Comparison and history: Europe in cross-national perspective* (London, 2004). Cohen and O’Connor prefer the term ‘cross-national’ to ‘transnational’ as a ‘more neutral term to describe the scope of an historian’s investigation’ (p. xiii). For an analytical review of similar approaches to Atlantic history, see David Armitage, ‘Is there a pre-history of globalization’, in Cohen & O’Connor (eds), *Comparison & history*, pp 165–76, and idem, ‘Three concepts of Atlantic history’ in David Armitage and Michael Braddick (eds), *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (London, 2002), pp 11–27.

¹⁷ For a review of these developments, see Wendy Webster, ‘Transnational histories and domestic journeys’ in *Journal of Social History*, 39, no. 3 (2006), pp 651–66. The work of other historians, such as Catherine Hall, has been very influential in this process: see *Civilising subjects: metropole and colony in the English imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge, 2002), and idem with Sonya O. Rose (eds), *At home with the Empire: metropolitan culture and the imperial world* (Cambridge, 2006). Many of the monograph studies have appeared in the Manchester University Press series, *Studies in Imperialism*, edited by John M. MacKenzie and now running to over eighty volumes.

¹⁸ Akira Iriye, ‘Internationalizing international history’ in Thomas Bender (ed.), *Rethinking American history in a global age* (Berkeley, 2002), p. 51. Important contributions to the American debate include David Thelen, ‘The nation and beyond: transnational perspectives on United States history’ in *Journal of American History*, 86, no. 3 (Dec. 1999), pp 965–75; Ian Tyrell, ‘American exceptionalism in an age of international history’ in *American Historical Review*, 96, no. 4 (Oct. 1991), pp 1031–55; and most recently, C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connolly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol and Patricia Seed, ‘AHR conversation: on transnational history’ in *American Historical Review*, 111, no. 5 (Dec. 2006), pp 1441–64.

thinking about globalisation acting to present the past in a way that suits our contemporary concerns? Easily dismissed as modish, transnational history is much more than this, and requires the adoption of different methodologies and ambitious conceptual frameworks. As one contributor to a debate on the subject in 2006 put it, ‘the key claim of any transnational approach is its central concern with movements, flows, and circulation, not simply as a theme or motif but as an analytical set of methods which defines the endeavour itself’.¹⁹ Furthermore, it is the movement itself that influences the individual, artefact, object or institution, so it ‘is not simply that historical processes are made in different places but that they are constructed in the movement between places, sites and regions’.²⁰ In other words, it is concerned with exploring the effects that the movement has on the individual or artefact. This methodology stresses connections and interactions, as well as seeing bodies of water as linking people and places rather than marking out boundaries and divisions.²¹ This emphasis on connections is evident in one of the most impressive works of transnational history yet produced, C. A. Bayly’s account of the development of the modern world in the ‘long nineteenth century’.²²

II

The context of historical writing in Ireland has influenced how the Irish overseas have been viewed. The diaspora was confined to the margins of the consciousness since both the imagined nation before 1922 and then the nation state (or states) remained the dominant units of analysis. Strictly speaking, in constitutional terms Ireland was one of the four nations within the British state, although commonly viewed as a separate geographical entity, if not a political one, before 1921. Both British politicians and Irish nationalists assumed an inherent unity to the island of Ireland. The conflict arose about the relationship of this entity to the British nation state. The Irish historiographical ‘revolution’ of the 1930s established the terms for professional scholarship, setting in train a determined effort to undermine many aspects of traditional nationalist understandings.²³ One of the principal architects of this professionalisation, T. W. Moody, was heavily involved in the design and execution of the monumental *New history of Ireland*, Ireland’s equivalent to the multivolume *New Cambridge modern history*. As originally conceived, the *New history*, in its indicative outline at least, had relatively little space earmarked for the Irish abroad; the final volumes did, nevertheless, devote significant coverage to the Irish diaspora, with important chapters by David Fitzpatrick, David Noel

¹⁹ Bayly et al., ‘AHR conversation’, p. 1444.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Caroline W. Bynum, ‘Perspectives, connections and objects: what’s happening in history now?’ in *Dædalus*, 138, no. 1 (2009), p. 82. For a recent account that places heavy emphasis on stretches of water as connecting people, see Christopher Harvie, *A floating commonwealth: politics, culture, and technology on Britain’s Atlantic coast, 1860–1930* (Oxford, 2008).

²² C. A. Bayly, *The birth of the modern world, 1780–1914: global connections and comparisons* (Oxford, 2004).

²³ For a useful if rather schematic account, see Evi Gkotsaridis, *Trials of Irish history: genesis and evolution of a reappraisal, 1938–2000* (London, 2006).

Doyle and Patrick O'Farrell on the period after 1801.²⁴ But the example of the *New history* merely points to a wider issue: the overall narrative of late modern Ireland with its political focus has retained a remarkable degree of continuity over time, and fitting the diasporic experience within this schema has proved problematic. For instance, the chronological framework in which a number of recent overviews of Ireland since the late eighteenth century are set do not differ greatly from that adopted by P. S. O'Hegarty in his account of Ireland under the Union, even if the authors adopt a vastly different viewpoint on the actual events, and cover more recent times.²⁵ Political and constitutional subjects that have receded in interest in other anglophone writing, particularly in the U.S., Britain, Canada and Australia, continue to dominate the history of late modern Ireland. In this respect, late modern Irish history is rightly described as exceptional. O'Connellite politics, the Great Famine, the Land War, the home rule crises and, of course, the Irish revolution of 1916–22 are given prominence, and thereafter the separate political histories of the two Irelands. Only one synthetic account has adopted what might be described as a thematic approach, focusing on broader developments.²⁶ Even a brief comparison with recent writing on modern Britain serves to underline the distinctiveness of this traditionalist approach. The published volumes of the *New Oxford history of England* – a series hardly known for its subversive intent – that cover the period after 1783 adopt a perspective that combines political, economic, social, cultural and regional history in almost equal measure in a synoptic approach, without privileging one form of historical inquiry over another.²⁷

The other noteworthy feature is the continuing fascination with biography. Much of the best work since the mid-twentieth century is primarily biographical in approach. In the last quarter of that century, three classics of historical biography emerged: F. S. L. Lyons's masterpiece on Parnell, Oliver MacDonagh's beautifully

²⁴ T. W. Moody, 'A new history of Ireland', *I.H.S.*, xvi, no. 63 (Mar. 1969), p. 257; for the period after 1801 the relevant chapters are: David Fitzpatrick, 'Emigration, 1801–70' in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union, i (1801–70)* (Oxford, 1989), pp 562–622; idem, 'Emigration, 1871–1921' in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, vi: Ireland under the Union, ii (1871–1921)* (Oxford, 1996), pp 606–52; idem, '"A peculiar tramping people": the Irish in Britain, 1801–70' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v*, pp 623–60; 'The Irish in Britain, 1871–1921' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, vi*, pp 653–702; David Noel Doyle, 'The Irish in North America, 1776–1845' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v*, pp 682–725; idem, 'The remaking of Irish-America, 1845–80' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, vi*, pp 725–61; Patrick O'Farrell, 'The Irish in Australia and New Zealand' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v*, pp 661–81; idem, 'The Irish in Australia and New Zealand, 1870–1990' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, vi*, pp 703–24; J. J. Sexton, 'Emigration and immigration in the twentieth century: an overview' in J. R. Hill (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, vii: Ireland, 1921–84* (Oxford, 2003), pp 796–825. In total, of the eighty-four chapters in the three volumes covering the period between 1801 and 1984, nine are exclusively devoted to emigration and the Irish overseas.

²⁵ See, for instance, Bew, *Ireland*.

²⁶ Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800*.

²⁷ Boyd Hilton, *A mad, bad, and dangerous people? England, 1783–1846* (Oxford, 2006); K. T. Hoppen, *The mid-Victorian generation, 1846–1886* (Oxford, 1998); G. R. Searle, *A new England? Peace and war, 1886–1918* (Oxford, 2004); Brian Harrison, *Seeking a role: the United Kingdom, 1951–1970* (Oxford, 2009); idem, *Finding a role? The United Kingdom 1970–1990* (Oxford, 2010).

written life of O'Connell, and R. F. Foster's equally stylish and probing treatment of W. B. Yeats.²⁸ Many other recent biographies of political figures – ranging across the spectrum from Eamon de Valera to Eoin O'Duffy – have quite rightly attracted widespread attention, as the best biographies provide numerous insights into the wider world of an individual.²⁹ The case for repeated reinterpretations of the same people, or for biographies of more minor personalities, is less persuasive. The obvious limitation of a poorly conceived biography is that it tends to overstate the significance of any one individual relative to the wider milieu, and, naturally, the disposition and outlook of the subject is given prominent billing. Just as earlier nationalist writers sought to canonise particular political leaders, the revisionist impulse was to demythologise the lives of the 'great and good'. Whilst these writings nourish a very strong appetite for public history within Ireland, where national politics is heavily orientated towards the strengths and failings of personalities rather than ideology or policies, sometimes they can seem a little too narrow and introspective to an outsider.

Both of these features of historical writing on late modern Ireland can be explained by developments from the mid-twentieth onwards. Until the 1970s the journal *Irish Historical Studies* was dominated by political and constitutional history, even if the odd article on social history managed to slip through the net. The self-conscious intent to challenge older nationalist accounts of Irish history inevitably ensured that the core subject matter was political. As Lyons observed in 1971, a paradox was that even though this 'revolution has to a large extent taken politics out of history, it has only been able to do so by concerning itself mainly with political history'.³⁰ The equally self-conscious positivist emphasis on empirical research on archival and published sources, so as to foster a more 'scientific' approach to historical writing, meant that private papers of politicians and administrators, official records and government publications were the basic building blocks on which this 'new' history of Ireland was to be constructed. Empiricism stressed the primacy of the records of the state in opposition to the earlier accounts of protagonists and their supporters, often based on contemporary recollections, memoirs and first-hand experience. The release of huge amounts of official documentation under the 1986 National Archives Act enabled researchers to access the records of the Irish government since 1922, and merely accelerated the trend towards political history in what was ostensibly a 'gold rush' phenomenon. The obvious limitation with these types of source materials is that they privilege the view of the elite, whether it be the nationalist political establishment or the politicians and administrators who ruled Ireland before and after 1921–2, both British and Irish. The exploitation of official source materials is also found in the continuing appeal of studies based on the history of administration and public policy, some of which rarely enter into the complexities of the effects on everyday life, such as health, education, welfare and the family, preferring, instead,

²⁸ F. S. L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell* (London, 1977); Oliver MacDonagh, *The hereditary bondsman: Daniel O'Connell 1775–1829* (London, 1988); idem, *The emancipist: Daniel O'Connell, 1830–47* (London, 1989); R. F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: a life* (2 vols, Oxford, 1997–2003).

²⁹ Diarmaid Ferriter, *Judging Dev: a reassessment of the life and legacy of Eamon de Valera* (Dublin, 2007); Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: a self-made hero* (Oxford, 2005).

³⁰ F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (London, 1971), p. ix.

to stick to tracing the debates surrounding the formulation of policy as a subject in itself. States, even small ones like the Southern Irish state after 1921, tend to be very good at archiving huge amounts of documentary material, most of it fairly mundane. During the period of the Union, copious amounts of published material were made available through parliamentary papers and other public documents. As Karl Marx famously observed about British rule in India, it was one ‘immense writing machine’, and the same description could be applied to the British administration in Ireland.³¹ However, the historian’s boon in being able to readily access such an Aladdin’s cave of material poses a number of conceptual problems. The first and most obvious limitation is that this is the establishment or the state’s view of things, often contrived to deal with short-term exigencies, such as ensuring a policy is brought into operation or justifying a particular decision.

Successive administrations in Ireland were naturally more concerned with those who lived within the country, sparing little thought for the millions of exiles who had left. One of the most consistent features was that governments felt no responsibility for the migrants who left, and this continued right up to the 1950s and 1960s, and is reflected in the official documentary record. The conditions that migrants encountered in the receiving societies were only ever a matter of official concern when their plight was highlighted in the national press, such as in 1951 when the deplorable housing situation of the Irish in Birmingham compelled de Valera to address this issue, albeit in a disingenuous way by asserting that there was no need for people to leave Ireland as work was available.³² When migration does, then, feature in official publications or government records, it is framed as a ‘problem’. Using such archival material exclusively to construct a history of migration inadvertently creates the sense of one problem after another. Official records contain only the slightest traces of documentation relating to the experience of migration, with the exception of matters of quantification and policy. Since such sources were the mainstay of Irish historical writing until the early 1970s, it is therefore no great mystery that the lives of diasporic Irish rarely featured.

III

It was the rise of migration history in the 1940s and 1950s that shaped the writing on the history of the Irish overseas. A number of American and British scholars, such as Oscar Handlin, Thomas N. Brown, Arnold Schrier, James E. Handley, and John Archer Jackson, working independently of the Irish historical ‘establishment’, completed seminal studies of the Irish abroad.³³ Handlin’s interest

³¹ Karl Marx, ‘The government of India’, *New York Daily Tribune*, 20 July 1853. One online collection of digitised materials contains 14,000 official publications: see Enhanced British Parliamentary Papers on Ireland (<http://eppi.dippam.ac.uk>). For some enlightening comparisons with British rule in India, see Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its form of knowledge: the British in India* (Princeton, 1996), pp 1–15.

³² Enda Delaney, *Demography, state and society: Irish migration to Britain, 1921–1971* (Kingston/Montreal & Liverpool, 2000), pp 193–4.

³³ Oscar Handlin, *Boston’s immigrants, 1790–1865: a study in acculturation* (1st ed., Cambridge, Mass, 1941); Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American nationalism, 1870–1890* (Philadelphia, 1966); Arnold Schrier, *Ireland and the American emigration, 1850–1900* (1st ed., Minneapolis, 1958); James E. Handley, *The Irish in Scotland, 1798–1845* (Cork,

was of particular significance as he was one of the leading American historians of the mid-twentieth century, and a winner of the Pulitzer Prize for history in 1952. His first major work, *Boston's immigrants*, published in 1941 and ostensibly concerned with all immigrants to that city, used quantitative and documentary sources to present a 'bleak' assessment of the fate of the city's Irish community.³⁴ His evocative study of Europeans who settled in American cities, *The uprooted*, lent the subject an authority in the U.S. that it never achieved in Britain.³⁵ Special mention should be made of the American historian Arnold Schrier's classic analysis of the place of emigration in post-Famine Irish society, the first study to draw on personal letters and on a wealth of folklore material generated by a questionnaire distributed to collectors working with the Irish Folklore Commission in 1955.³⁶ The only substantive work to come from an Irish historian in the 1950s were Oliver MacDonagh's important treatments of emigration from Ireland during the Great Famine.³⁷ Having studied with R. D. Edwards at U.C.D. in the 1940s, he was a second-generation historian associated with the 'revolution', and the only one to have published on the Irish abroad throughout his long and distinguished career; no doubt, this was because he spent most of his professional life living outside of Ireland, first studying, then teaching at Cambridge, followed by Australia, with a brief interval in Cork.³⁸

From the 1960s onwards this field was transformed beyond recognition. What characterised these studies was methodological innovation. Drawing on the techniques of the 'new' social and urban history emerging in North America and Europe, historians imaginatively reconstructed urban communities using census and other sources, fusing quantitative and qualitative approaches. Classics within this genre include Stephan Thernstrom's study of Boston's immigrants, Lynn Hollen Lees's account of the Irish in Victorian London, and R. A. Burchell's study of the San Francisco Irish, all published in the 1970s.³⁹ A major concern was tracing patterns of social mobility, adjustment and adaptation. The irony was that, until the development of systematic urban history in Ireland during the 1980s and 1990s, more was known about the Irish who lived in cities outside of Ireland than about those in the major cities of Belfast, Dublin and Cork. What was less certain was the Irish background to these studies, which often relied on outdated interpretations of the society that the migrants had left. In the words of Owen Dudley

1943); idem, *The Irish in modern Scotland* (Cork, 1947); John Archer Jackson, *The Irish in Britain* (London, 1963).

³⁴ Meagher, *Columbia guide to Irish American history*, p. 359. For a detailed assessment of this book, see Robert Sean Wilentz, 'Industrialising American and the Irish: towards the new departure' in *Labor History*, 20, no. 4 (1979), pp 580–6.

³⁵ Oscar Handlin, *The uprooted* (2nd ed., Boston, 1973).

³⁶ Schrier, *Ireland & the American emigration*.

³⁷ Oliver MacDonagh, 'The Irish Catholic clergy and emigration during the Great Famine' in *I.H.S.*, v, no. 20 (1947), pp 287–302; idem, 'Irish emigration to the United States of America and the British colonies during the Famine' in R. D. Edwards and T. D. Williams (eds), *The Great Famine: studies in Irish history, 1845–52* (Dublin, 1956), pp 319–88.

³⁸ See idem, *Looking back: living and writing history*, ed. Tom Dunne (Dublin, 2008).

³⁹ Stephan Thernstrom, *The other Bostonians: poverty and progress in the American metropolis, 1880–1970* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973); Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish migrants in Victorian London* (Manchester, 1979); R. A. Burchell, *The San Francisco Irish, 1848–1880* (Manchester, 1979). To this list may be added Dennis Clark, *The Irish in Philadelphia: ten generations of urban experience* (Philadelphia, 1974).

Edwards, ‘scholarship in the old days of assimilationism belittled the Irish dimension of the Irish-American experience; it was best seen as a caterpillar’s skin to be shed before the contemplation of a truly American butterfly’.⁴⁰ The publication in 1985 of Kerby A. Miller’s *Emigrants and exiles* was a landmark in this respect.⁴¹ By far the most important work on Irish migration to North America to have ever appeared, Miller adopted what he termed a ‘transatlantic’ approach, tracing the history of the American-Irish back to Ireland, and utilising an impressive range of source materials drawn from both countries. While a number of his conclusions have been challenged, without doubt this is an enduring and intellectually ambitious work, and a model of sophisticated transnational history.⁴² This monumental book inspired a range of studies that sought to place the experiences of the diaspora in a broadly transnational context, linking the movement of people from Ireland to the U.S. to an understanding of the Irish background.⁴³ Other treatments, nevertheless, still continued to retain an attachment to rather outdated interpretations of Irish society. As noted by David Noel Doyle in 1999, what is required is ‘a surer grasp of Irish backgrounds by overseas diaspora historians’.⁴⁴

A response to Miller’s work was the impetus for comparative histories of Irish settlement to test his conclusions in other contexts. Within the U.S. itself – particularly along the west coast – there was evidence of Irish ‘success’ in more favourable environments, such as San Francisco.⁴⁵ More than any other scholar, D. H. Akenson has demonstrated that examining Irish communities outside of the U.S. adds complexity to understandings of ethnicity, religion and, ultimately, the nature of the diasporic experience. Through a series of wide-ranging studies of the Irish in Canada, South Africa and New Zealand, Akenson combined detailed statistical analyses with impressive knowledge of the context within the receiving societies to construct what is essentially a framework for a global history of Irish migration – a synthesis he first published in 1993.⁴⁶ The comparative dimension has generated a number of important studies on a national, regional or local level that seek to understand what, if anything, was distinctive about the environments – political, social, cultural or religious – within which the Irish settled.⁴⁷ Accounts

⁴⁰ Owen Dudley Edwards, ‘Conclusion: some counterthemes’, in David Noel Doyle and Owen Dudley Edwards (eds), *America and Ireland, 1776–1976: the American identity and the Irish connection* (Westport, Conn., 1980), p. 313.

⁴¹ Miller, *Emigrants and exiles*.

⁴² Kenny, ‘Twenty years’, pp 67–8.

⁴³ For example, David M. Emmons, *The Butte Irish: class and ethnicity in an American mining town, 1875–1925* (Urbana, 1989); Kevin Kenny, *Making sense of the Molly Maguires* (New York, 1998); Robert Scally, *The end of hidden Ireland: rebellion, famine, and emigration* (New York, 1995).

⁴⁴ Doyle, ‘Cohesion & diversity’, p. 432.

⁴⁵ See, for example, R. A. Burchell, *The San Francisco Irish, 1848–1880* (Manchester, 1979).

⁴⁶ D. H. Akenson, *The Irish diaspora* (Toronto, 1993).

⁴⁷ J. Matthew Gallman, *Receiving Erin’s children: Philadelphia, Liverpool and the Irish Famine* (Chapel Hill, 2000); Malcolm Campbell, *Ireland’s new worlds: immigrants, politics and society in the United States and Australia, 1815–1922* (Madison, 2008), pp 95–6; idem, ‘The other immigrants: comparing the Irish in Australia and the United States’ in *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 14 (1995), pp 3–22; William Jenkins, ‘Identity, place, and the political mobilization of urban minorities: comparative perspectives on Irish Catholics in Buffalo and Toronto 1880–1910’ in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 25

that compare the Irish with other ethnic or national groups either from the sending countries or in the receiving societies are rare. Akenson's most recent treatment of the Irish and Swedish experiences of emigration in the nineteenth century will undoubtedly provide a fillip for other similar studies.⁴⁸

The second strand in the historical writing on the diaspora has centred on individual experiences charted through personal letters and other first-hand accounts, such as autobiographies, diaries and memoirs. While questions are rightly raised about the representativeness of such sources – indeed, the surviving letters, for instance, were written by a minute fraction of the millions who left – the principal benefit of using personal testimonies is that they enable historians to reconstruct individual and, often, intensely private and emotional experiences of migration, adjustment and settlement. It is a truism that in an historiography dominated by high politics, the powerless and marginalised often get short shrift, and one of the central objectives of the 'history from below' that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s was to recover and interpret similar life stories. Schrier and Miller have made extensive use of personal letters in studies of Irish migration to the U.S., and O'Farrell has done likewise with regard to Australia.⁴⁹ Miller and his colleagues have also edited an impressive collection of letters, memoirs and autobiographies covering the colonial and revolutionary periods.⁵⁰ It is the work of David Fitzpatrick on Irish migration to Australia that stands out as a classic of historical scholarship, with his sensitive analysis of the letters together with the presentation of an extraordinary amount of background information on the correspondents themselves.⁵¹ Read alongside the writings of other scholars, such as O'Farrell and, more recently, Angela McCarthy, what emerges is a nuanced portrait of life in Ireland, Australia and New Zealand, and unique glimpses into the private conversations that occurred over thousands of miles.⁵² Such personal letters, as Fitzpatrick indicates, reveal much about family relationships, personal identities and both the society migrants left and the new ones into which they settled:

Letters cannot tell us why people migrated or what they experienced; but they can reveal how these deeply private matters were conveyed for the benefit of intimates. They testify to the power of the written word as a tool for sustaining solidarity among separated kinfolk and asserting individual rights within family and neighbourhood networks. The uncertainties

(2007), pp 160–86; idem, 'Deconstructing diasporas: networks and identities among the Irish in Buffalo and Toronto, 1870–1910' in *Immigrants and Minorities*, 23, nos. 2–3 (2005), pp 359–98; Donald M. MacRaild, 'Crossing migrant frontiers: comparative reflections on Irish migrants in Britain and the United States during the nineteenth century' in Donald M. MacRaild (ed.), *The Great Famine and beyond: Irish migrants in Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (London, 2000), pp 40–71; Matthew J. O'Brien, "'Irishness" in Great Britain and the United States: Transatlantic and cross-channel migration networks and ethnicity' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2002).

⁴⁸ D. H. Akenson, *Ireland, Sweden, and the great European migration, 1815–1914* (Kingston/Montreal & Liverpool, 2011).

⁴⁹ Schrier, *Ireland & the American emigration*; Miller, *Emigrants & exiles*; Patrick O'Farrell, *Letters from Irish Australia, 1825–1929* (Belfast, 1994).

⁵⁰ Kerby A. Miller, Bruce Boling, David Noel Doyle and Arnold Schrier, *Irish immigrants in the land of Canaan: letters and memoirs from colonial and revolutionary America, 1675–1815* (New York, 2002).

⁵¹ Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of consolation*.

⁵² Angela McCarthy, *Irish migrants in New Zealand, 1840–1937: 'the desired haven'* (Woodbridge, 2005).

aroused by migration provoked fascinating reflections on the differences between Ireland and Australia, and the very nature of 'Irishness'.⁵³

Other first-hand accounts – such as autobiographies, memoirs, diaries and oral histories – give similar insights into how individuals understood the world around them, and are valuable sources when investigating the effect of migration on personal identities as well as the importance of continued interactions with home.⁵⁴ Indeed, one can argue that it was the history of the diaspora that brought the complexity of first-hand everyday experiences to the forefront of Irish historical consciousness, offering an intimate portrait of ordinary people's lives. As Doyle commented over thirty years ago, American historians are interested in the ordinary Irish migrants whereas 'Irish scholars are more interested in the exceptional and the articulate', and this still largely holds true.⁵⁵ Another work that has not received the full attention it deserves is Richard White's fascinating exploration of his mother's departure from Kerry in the 1930s and her subsequent life in the U.S.⁵⁶ Not much noticed by historians either of the American-Irish or of twentieth-century Ireland, White, a distinguished historian of the American West and the environment, both tells his mother's story and locates her memories within the history of Ireland and the U.S. in a highly original form of a dialogue between a son and his mother, a historian and family folklore, and ultimately past and present.

Writing on the Irish overseas extends far beyond immigration and ethnic history, since historians concerned with labour, religion, race and urban politics in the host societies invariably investigate the role of the Irish. This work has served to give the historiography of the diaspora an important stimulus. Class, ethnic identity, the effects of urban living, the structures of family and household relationships, together with other subjects such as associational culture and gendered experiences, have created new ways of looking at the Irish past, whether that be in Ireland or elsewhere. What, then, might a transnational approach have to offer? In the first instance, it would involve a move away from the traditional areas of inquiry of high politics, constitutional history and administration. Explicitly, the nation state would no longer constitute the sole unit of analysis as the geographical and chronological framework would be determined by the particular subject matter or historical problem. For instance, a study of gender relations within the family could encompass both Ireland and the countries of Irish settlement.⁵⁷ The traditional recourse to documentary material generated by the state and its agents would be complemented by other source materials that are focused on individual

⁵³ Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of consolation*, pp 35–6.

⁵⁴ See, for instance, Liam Harte, *The literature of the Irish in Britain: autobiography and memoir, 1725–2001* (Basingstoke, 2009) for autobiographies; for diaries, see Colin G. Pooley, 'From Londonderry to London: identity and sense of place for a Protestant Northern Irish woman in the 1930s' in *Immigrants & Minorities*, 18, nos. 2–3 (July/Nov. 1999), pp 189–213, and for the use of oral histories and other first-hand accounts, see Angela McCarthy, *Personal narratives of Irish and Scottish migration, 1921–65: 'for spirit and adventure'* (Manchester, 2007)

⁵⁵ David Noel Doyle, 'Conclusion: some further themes', in Doyle & Edwards, *America & Ireland*, p. 320.

⁵⁶ Richard White, *Remembering Ahanagan: storytelling in a family's past* (New York, 1998).

⁵⁷ Kerby A. Miller, David Noel Doyle and Patricia Kelleher, "'For love and liberty': Irish women, migration and domesticity in Ireland and America, 1815–1920" in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *Irish women and Irish migration* (London, 1995), pp 41–65.

life stories. And, perhaps most importantly, the complexities of the lived experience would be systematically reconstructed.

IV

What subjects might constitute the outline of this transnational history? The potential is limitless, and only a few suggestions can be made here. Popular politics will dominate, and rightly so given the precocious mobilisation of nationalist politics in Ireland. The involvement of Irish-born figures, such as Fergus O'Connor and Thomas D'Arcy McGee, in the national politics of Britain, the U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand will be an important element. Biography will naturally have a transnational dimension where the subject had interactions across national boundaries.⁵⁸ Within this broad theme, revolutionary movements, such as the exiled United Irishmen, Young Ireland, the Fenians and the I.R.A., have generated particular interest, not least because their activities were closely monitored by the agencies of the state, and hence left a rich documentary archive for historians.⁵⁹ Taken together with the large number of first-hand and biographical accounts of participants – most of which require very careful reading – it is possible to piece together the activities of these organisations as they operated in Ireland and in diasporic communities, and to chart the differences between the two. Constitutional Irish nationalism, too, has merited extended treatment, especially from the Parnellite era onwards. The home rule movement was the first broad-based nationalist movement to connect the diaspora in the U.S., Britain and Australia with a vigorous political campaign in Ireland. This model was subsequently adopted by other organisations, such as the United Irish League and, ultimately, Sinn Féin after 1916.⁶⁰ In the 1940s the Anti-Partition League had a diasporic dimension to its activities in Britain, Australia and, especially, Irish-America. From the 1970s onwards, the 'long war' in Northern Ireland had a profound impact on Irish communities in the U.S. and Britain, as they were mobilised in support of nationalist and republican campaigns, ranging from Noraid's (Irish Northern Aid) fund-raising for arms for the I.R.A. to applying leverage on influential Irish-American politicians to help secure a constitutional settlement.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Two excellent recent examples of such transnational biographies are David Fitzpatrick's *Harry Boland's Irish revolution* (Cork, 2003) and David A. Wilson's *Thomas D'Arcy McGee: i: passion, reason, and politics, 1825–1857* (Montreal, 2008).

⁵⁹ David A. Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States: immigrant radicals in the early republic* (Dublin, 1998); John Belchem, 'Nationalism, republicanism and exile: Irish emigrants and the revolutions of 1848' in *Past & Present*, no. 146 (Feb. 1995), pp 103–35; Brian Jenkins, *The Fenian problem: insurgency and terrorism in a liberal state, 1858–1874* (Liverpool, 2009); Peter Hart, "'Operations abroad': the IRA in Britain, 1919–23" in *English Historical Review*, 115, no. 460 (2000), pp 71–102; Fearghal McGarry and James McConnel (eds), *The black hand of republicanism: Fenianism in modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2009).

⁶⁰ Alan O'Day, 'Irish diaspora politics in perspective: the United Irish Leagues of Great Britain and America, 1900–14' in MacRaild (ed.), *Great Famine*, pp 214–39.

⁶¹ See Andrew J. Wilson, *Irish America and the Ulster conflict, 1968–1995* (Washington D.C., 1995); Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp 246–57; D. G. Boyce, *The Irish question and British politics, 1868–1996* (2nd ed., Basingstoke, 1996), pp 105–56.

It was not only nationalist groups that had a transnational dimension. The Orange Order was a model of an organisation that transcended national borders, and lodges in Britain, Canada and Australia maintained close contact with Ireland. The work of David Fitzpatrick, Donald MacRaild, William Jenkins and Eric Kaufmann has in each case demonstrated how local needs often coexisted with the more traditional concerns of the Orange Order: maintaining Protestant fraternity and organising public displays of loyalty.⁶² The diasporic activities of political unionism from the 1880s are less well known, and this is a subject badly in need of scholarly investigation. Countries such as Canada, the U.S., Australia and New Zealand had significant Irish Protestant populations, and is likely that these were mobilised through direct contacts and political propaganda during times of acute constitutional crises in the 1880s and 1890s, and again in 1914. Personal letters from Australia and New Zealand show that Irish Protestants were acutely aware of the potential difficulties if home rule was granted.⁶³ In more recent times, the alliance since the 1970s of the Conservative Party with Ulster unionism ensured that the Irish question remained essentially a British one until the Belfast Agreement of 1998.⁶⁴

The other side of the equation is the involvement of the diasporic Irish in the popular politics of the countries of settlement, often fusing Irish-nationalist sentiment with the practicalities of forging an ethnic identity. The role of the American-Irish in Democratic Party politics in the U.S. is well known, as is Irish participation in the Australian Labor Party from its foundation in 1891.⁶⁵ In Britain, the Irish were strong supporters of the nascent labour movement in the nineteenth century, and the Labour Party became the party of choice for Irish voters over the course of the twentieth century.⁶⁶ After 1945 the involvement of the Catholic Irish in the Labour Party was the principal form of Irish political activism in Britain, with republican-socialist groups, such as the Connolly Association, attracting only

⁶² David Fitzpatrick, 'Exporting brotherhood: Orangeism in South Australia' in Enda Delaney and Donald M. MacRaild (eds), *Irish migration, networks and ethnic identity since 1750* (London, 2007), pp 129–62; Donald M. MacRaild, *Faith, fraternity and fighting: the Orange Order and Irish migrants in northern England, c. 1850–1920* (Liverpool, 2005), pp 286–320; idem, 'Wherever orange is worn: Orangeism and Irish migration in the nineteenth and early twentieth century' in *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 28, no. 2 (2002), pp 98–117; William Jenkins, 'Between the lodge and the meeting-house: mapping Irish Protestant identities and social worlds in late Victorian Toronto' in *Social and Cultural Geography*, 4 (2003), pp 75–98; Eric Kaufmann, 'The Orange Order in Scotland since 1860: a social analysis' in M. J. Mitchell (ed.), *New perspectives on the Irish in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2008), pp 159–90.

⁶³ McCarthy, *Irish migrants in New Zealand*, pp 213–14; O'Farrell, *Letters from Irish Australia*, pp 82, 216.

⁶⁴ See Paul Dixon, '"The usual English doubletalk": the British political parties and the Ulster Unionists 1974–94' in *Irish Political Studies*, 9 (1994), pp 25–40. The literature on the Ulster Unionist Party and the U.S. is slight: see Andrew J. Wilson, 'Ulster unionists in America, 1972–1985' in *New Hibernia Review*, 11, no. 1 (2007), pp 50–73; idem, 'The Ulster Unionist Party and the U.S. role in the Northern Ireland peace process, 1994–2000' in *Policy Studies Journal*, 28, no. 4 (2000), pp 858–74.

⁶⁵ Colm Kiernan, 'Home rule for Ireland and the formation of the Australian Labor Party, 1883 to 1891', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 38, no. 1 (1991), pp 1–11.

⁶⁶ Steven Fielding, *Class and ethnicity: Irish Catholics in England, 1880–1939* (Buckingham, 1993), pp 100–26.

minimal support.⁶⁷ The obvious point here is that the Irish at home only supported radical politics at key moments, such as during the Land League agitation of the early 1880s and the labour unrest in 1913–14, whilst the diasporic Irish had a much longer and more sustained engagement with radicalism. Socialism and the politics of class emerged only sporadically in an Ireland faced with, what Joseph Lee has dubbed, the ‘three evil geniuses of socialism – priest, patriot and peasant’.⁶⁸ The standard explanation for this is that the labour movement was sidelined by nationalism during the revolutionary period.⁶⁹ This, together with the antagonism of the Catholic Church, ensured that radical politics remained on the margins as the ‘conservative’ revolutionaries set about challenging and eventually overthrowing British rule. A transnational framework poses a challenge to this interpretation, given how progressive politics resonated more with Irish-born populations in the U.S., Britain and Australia.

There was also an attempt to link grievances across ethnic and national lines.⁷⁰ In part, this was due to the accommodation that the Catholic clergy in these societies reached, whereby the critique of inequality was seen as a means of achieving social justice and challenging Protestant dominance. It may also be explained by the migrant encounter with industrial capitalism, which determined social relations and promoted class as well as ethnic consciousness in ways very different to those experienced in the predominantly agricultural society of Ireland until the 1950s.

A truly transnational history of the Irish encounter with industrial capitalism would connect the mill workers of Belfast with those in Philadelphia or Manchester, and in many other places where large-scale factory employment was dominant. For the twentieth century, the factories operated by the Ford Motor Company in Cork and Dagenham (a substantial number of workers in the Dagenham plant during the 1940s and 1950s hailed from Cork) could provide a fascinating context for a study of labour relations in a heavily regulated environment.⁷¹ Similarly, a history of Irish female domestic servants that encompassed Ireland, Britain and the U.S. from the 1870s until its decline during the Second World War would enable a detailed analysis of gendered notions of domesticity.

Oddly, more is known about the complexities of class formation outside of Ireland. A major gap in our knowledge of nineteenth and twentieth-century Ireland concerns the significance of social class in rural, small-town and urban

⁶⁷ Enda Delaney, *Irish in post-war Britain* (Oxford, 2007), pp 188–9.

⁶⁸ Joseph Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society, 1848–1918* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1989), p. 151.

⁶⁹ Michael Laffan, ‘“Labour must wait”: Ireland’s conservative revolution’ in P. J. Corish (ed.), *Radicals, rebels and establishments* (Belfast, 1985), pp 203–22.

⁷⁰ A seminal article on the forging of class and ethnic consciousness in the 1880s is Eric Foner, ‘Class, ethnicity and radicalism in the gilded age: the Land League and Irish America’ in *Marxist Perspectives*, i, no. 2 (1979), pp 6–55. See also David Montgomery, ‘The Irish and the American labor movement’ in Doyle & Edwards (eds), *America & Ireland*, pp 205–18. For a critique of these interpretations that lays particular emphasis on the incorporation of middle-class values and the construction of Irish ethnic solidarity across social classes, see Kerby A. Miller, ‘Class, culture, and ethnicity: the construction of Irish America in the nineteenth century’, in idem, *Ireland and Irish America: culture, class, and transatlantic migration* (Dublin, 2008), pp 245–80.

⁷¹ Delaney, *The Irish in post-war Britain*, p. 91. On the Cork plant, see Miriam Nyham, *Are you still below? The Ford Marina plant, Cork, 1917–1984* (Cork, 2007).

Ireland. There is a need for a study comparable in sophistication and originality to McKibbin's studies of Britain that placed special emphasis on the development and articulation of specific class-based cultures.⁷² Much of the work on Ireland has come from social scientists whose interest is primarily with the post-1945 era and with only the briefest of historical perspectives, or from historians concerned with the political outlooks of various social groups.⁷³ A recent collection of essays demonstrates that class *did* matter in modern Ireland, as opposed to the traditional view that it was the 'national' rather than the 'social' question that predominated.⁷⁴ The tensions between those who held land and those who worked it is the most obvious fissure, but there are all sorts of other distinctions based on education, equality of opportunity, gender, status and notions of respectability.

At one time, it was taken as read that the diasporic Irish were the displaced proletariat of modern Ireland. How the working class Irish were incorporated into the existing social structure of the receiving societies has attracted a considerable literature. Equally, the aspirations of the Catholic Irish middle class were reflected in the paths they followed in Britain and the U.S., and within the imperial civil service in India and other parts of the Empire in the later nineteenth century.⁷⁵ The attitudes towards migration are also of interest: for the strong farmers of the south and west of Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s, moving to England was associated with the working classes, as recorded by the sociologist Liam Ryan:

To the unskilled and unemployed England seemed a land of opportunity, but to the fifty-acre farmers and the petty bourgeoisie of the towns and villages it seemed a kind of ghetto for Irish people, a kind of huge Irish slum, a place where none of the better-class people ever went,

⁷² Ross McKibbin, *The ideologies of class: social relations in Britain, 1880–1950* (Oxford, 1990); idem, *Classes and cultures: England 1918–1951* (Oxford, 1998). An exception here is Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland, 1900–2000* (London, 2006), which lays special emphasis on class in twentieth-century Ireland, albeit within a much broader panorama of subjects.

⁷³ See Richard Breen, Damian F. Hannan, David B. Rottman and Christopher T. Whelan, *Understanding contemporary Ireland: state, class and development in the Republic of Ireland* (London, 1990); Christopher T. Whelan, Richard Breen and Brendan J. Whelan, 'Industrialisation, class formation and social mobility in Ireland' in J. H. Goldthorpe and C. T. Whelan (eds), *The development of industrial society in Ireland* (Oxford, 1992), pp 105–28; Richard Breen and Christopher Whelan, 'Social mobility in Ireland: a comparative analysis', in Anthony F. Heath, Richard Breen and Christopher T. Whelan (eds), *Ireland North and South: perspectives from the social sciences* (Oxford, 1999), pp 319–39; Damian F. Hannan, *Displacement and development: class, kinship and social change in Irish rural communities* (Dublin, 1979); Michael Hout, *Following in father's footsteps: social mobility in Ireland* (Cambridge, Mass, 1989); Fintan Lane and Donal Ó Drisceoil (eds), *Politics and the Irish working class, 1830–1945* (Basingstoke, 2005).

⁷⁴ Fintan Lane (ed.), *Politics, society and the middle class in modern Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2010).

⁷⁵ Patricia Kelleher, 'Class and Catholic Irish masculinity in antebellum America: young men on the make in Chicago', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 28, no. 4 (2009), pp 7–42; Andy Bielenberg, 'Irish emigration to the British Empire', in idem (ed.), *The Irish diaspora* (London, 2000), pp 215–34; Scott B. Cook, 'The Irish Raj: social origins and careers of Irishmen in the Indian civil service, 1855–1914' in *Journal of Social History*, 20, no. 3 (1987), pp 506–29; Keith Jeffery (ed.), *An Irish empire: aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester, 1996); Kevin Kenny, 'The Irish in the Empire', in idem (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2004), pp 90–122.

not even on holidays. And the threat of a son or daughter to take the boat train was a threat that the family name might be tainted with the mark of the emigrant and coupled with the labourers and others who somehow weren't talented enough to get employment at home.⁷⁶

A transnational history of class would examine both the diaspora and the Irish at home, and, most importantly, develop sophisticated and theoretically informed models that look at the evolution of class consciousness, tensions between and across social classes, the language of class, barriers to upward social mobility, patterns of consumption, and gendered notions of what it meant to be middle or working class.⁷⁷ The much-vilified 'lace-curtain' Irish in the U.S., who sought to distance themselves from their working-class compatriots, did not suddenly acquire such sensibilities on arrival at an American port, and, clearly, the Irish background was important even if the more fluid social structure in the U.S. facilitated a considerable degree of upward mobility.⁷⁸ A fascinating group are the Irish middle classes who 'conquered' London in the late nineteenth century. These writers, journalists, artists, politicians and lawyers had a very visible presence in metropolitan life, and had very different experiences than their working-class compatriots.⁷⁹ The professional middle classes who made their way to Britain in the mid-twentieth century went to extreme lengths to distinguish themselves from the working-class Irish, rejecting any sort of ethnic alliance.⁸⁰ Unlike in the U.S. – and, arguably, in Ireland itself – where the middle-classes sought to dominate ethnic and political organisations, and thereby put the working-class Irish on the path of the righteous to respectability and acceptance, there was no such alliance among the Irish in post-war Britain, who were sharply divided along class lines.⁸¹ As has been suggested by Doyle, this may be explained by the barriers to upward social mobility in Britain: 'America allowed such a risen class to remain still "Irish", whereas in Britain such mobility, where it occurred, was at the price of absorption and invisibility'.⁸²

Power is a subject that lends itself to a transnational study. Historians of late modern Ireland have traditionally conceived power in its narrowest interpretation: essentially, political voice. The historical sociologist Michael Mann, in his influential work, offers a broader understanding of power relations, and his approach involves more than simply an analysis of the state but, also, ideological,

⁷⁶ William Ryan, 'Assimilation of Irish immigrants in Britain (Ph.D. thesis, St Louis University, 1973), p. 114.

⁷⁷ See Kenny, 'Diaspora & comparison', pp 151–2, for the comparative history of Irish social mobility.

⁷⁸ David Noel Doyle, *Irish Americans, native rights and national empires: the structures, divisions and attitudes of the Catholic minority in the decade of expansion, 1890–1901* (New York, 1976); William Jenkins, 'In search of the lace curtain: residential mobility, class transformation, and everyday practice among Buffalo's Irish, 1880–1910' in *Journal of Urban History*, 35, no. 7 (2009), pp 970–7.

⁷⁹ See R. F. Foster, '"An Irish power in London": making it in the Victorian metropolis' in Fintan Cullen and R. F. Foster, *'Conquering England': Ireland in Victorian London* (London, 2005), and idem, *Paddy and Mr Punch: connections in Irish and English history* (London, 1993), pp 281–305.

⁸⁰ Delaney, *Irish in post-war Britain*, pp 197–9.

⁸¹ Dale B. Light, 'The role of Irish-American organisations in assimilation and community formation' in P. J. Drudy (ed.), *The Irish in America: emigration, assimilation and impact* (Cambridge, 1985), pp 113–41; Miller, 'Class, culture, & ethnicity'.

⁸² Doyle, 'Cohesion & diversity', p. 433.

economic and social aspects of power relations.⁸³ Quite appropriately, the historiography of the ‘long’ Irish revolution places an emphasis on the pursuit of political power from campaigns to ensure nationalist representation on the boards of Poor Law guardians to more wide-ranging demands for self-determination and sovereignty. Indeed, a recent account of elites sees access or non-access to positions within the Irish administration for the aspiring middle-class Catholics as being a central grievance in fostering nationalist sentiment prior to 1916.⁸⁴ After 1921–2 political power was essentially concentrated in the hands of the new elites: Catholic, educated, nationalist, predominantly lower middle class and conservative in outlook. For the exiles, they, too, faced inequalities based on ethnic and religious prejudices – being Catholic in the first instance, and then Irish – though these diminished over time as the Irish moved up the hierarchy of migrant groups in the principal receiving societies. The diasporic Irish sought to gain political power in local government in particular by mobilising Irish ethnic networks for very specific ends – usually to challenge the dominance of Protestant and sometimes Orange elites in places as diverse as Toronto, Liverpool, Boston and Coatbridge (in Scotland). Power, however, operated in spheres other than just politics. The economy, local communities, households, families and even in some instances personal relationships operated according to asymmetrical power relations. Reconstructing the dynamics of power in late modern Ireland in all its multifaceted complexity will require a transnational approach, not least to investigate if they operated in different ways in different environments. Perhaps the most interesting question to pursue by comparing the lives of those who stayed and those who left is whether migration offered emancipation and liberation from the oppressive social and gender relations that dominated in Ireland, as is so often widely assumed.

The list of potential subjects would extend to recreational and leisure patterns, popular religion, militarisation and much more. Another potential area is transnational material culture: a study of the objects and other artefacts that crossed the oceans with the migrant, or of the transfer of gifts and other items between the homeland and the diaspora. A recent suggestive study of the material culture of the Irish diaspora by an archaeologist indicates the potential for this type of work.⁸⁵ How and why a cherished object, be it a religious relic or family memento (and, later, a photograph), was brought thousands of miles raises fascinating questions about the transmission of material culture. It was not unusual for gifts to be sent in parcels back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean and the Irish Sea. Material was also amassed after settlement, sometimes to assert upwardly mobile middle-class aspirations, as made clear by Margaret Mulroney’s original study of the Du Pont Irish in Delaware, predominantly Catholics from Ulster.⁸⁶ Studies are now emerging of consumption patterns in nineteenth-century Ireland, and these could be assessed alongside those of the diaspora so as to interrogate the contemporary impression that on arrival in industrial societies the Irish suddenly

⁸³ Michael Mann, *The sources of social power: volume 1: a history of power from the beginning to A.D. 1760* (Cambridge, 1986).

⁸⁴ Fergus Campbell, *The Irish establishment, 1879–1914* (Oxford, 2009).

⁸⁵ Stephen A. Brighton, *Historical archaeology of the Irish diaspora: a transnational approach* (Knoxville, 2009).

⁸⁶ Margaret M. Mulroney, *Black powder, white lace: the Du Pont Irish and cultural identity in nineteenth-century America* (Hanover, N.H., 2002).

became acquisitive and obsessed with material goods rather than the pure and simple things in life.⁸⁷ As social investigation developed in the late nineteenth century, numerous studies of household budgets were completed, providing unique insights into consumption patterns of the working and lower middle classes.⁸⁸

Transnational history does not solely involve the movement of people and artefacts but also the exchange of ideas. The history of ideas is a vastly underdeveloped field within Irish historical writings, and here a distinction should be made from the history of political thought or intellectual history, both of which usually have quite specific if rather narrow concerns.⁸⁹ Doyle's fascinating but regrettably neglected writings that deal with the U.S. from the mid-eighteenth century until the First World War demonstrate the value of tracing how ideas were conditioned and, indeed, transformed by the process of migration.⁹⁰ Doyle's particular interest is with the transatlantic exchange, though there is no reason to suggest that a British or Australasian focus would not yield similar results. Formed and articulated in the uncertainties and tensions of life between Ireland and the U.S., he charts the views articulated by the American-Irish on pressing issues of the day, such as liberal democracy, social equality and imperialism. There is certainly plenty of scope for wide-ranging accounts of broad political ideologies, such as liberalism, conservatism and socialism, together with more discrete accounts of Irish attitudes towards materialism, secularisation, democracy and the 'social question', comparable in scope and ingenuity to the writings of scholars such as Jose Harris and Patrick Joyce on nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain.⁹¹

V

Paradoxically, the writing of modern Irish history in the century before the Union has a more obvious transnational focus through tracing the European influences on the origins and development of the United Irishmen, charting the emergence

⁸⁷ Stephanie Rains, *Commodity culture and social class in Dublin, 1850–1916* (Dublin, 2010).

⁸⁸ The most famous in the British context being Maud Pember Reeves, *Round about a pound a week* (London, 1913).

⁸⁹ Important works on the history of ideas include Oliver MacDonagh, *States of mind: a study of Anglo-Irish conflict 1780–1980* (London, 1983) and Patrick O'Farrell, *Ireland's English question: Anglo-Irish relations 1534–1970* (London, 1971).

⁹⁰ David Noel Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen and revolutionary America, 1760–1820* (Dublin, 1981); idem, 'Irish Catholicism in the diaspora: the case of the United States' in Brendan Bradshaw and Dáire Keogh (eds), *Christianity in Ireland: revisiting the story* (Dublin, 2002), pp 231–48; idem, 'Irish elites in North America and liberal democracy, 1820–1920' in *Radharc*, 3 (2002), pp 29–54; idem, *Irish Americans, native rights & national empires*; idem, 'Catholicism, politics and Irish America since 1890: some critical considerations' in Drudy (ed.), *Irish in America*, pp 191–230. As Doyle remarked about the down-playing of the work of another scholar, David Fitzpatrick, this 'is probably the fate of radically sophisticated achievement' ('Cohesion & diversity', p. 415 n. 14).

⁹¹ On the 'social question', see Bruce Nelson, 'Irish Americans, Irish nationalism, and the "social question", 1916–1923' in *boundary 2*, xxxi (2004), pp 147–78; Jose Harris, *Private lives, public spirit: Britain, 1870–1914* (Oxford, 1993), especially chps 7–8; Patrick Joyce, *Democratic subjects: the self and the social in nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1994).

of the radical and revolutionary 'green' Atlantic in the eighteenth century, and assessing the impact of the American Revolution on Ireland, or, indeed, the other way around: the role of Irish settlers in the American Revolution.⁹² Scholars of early modern Ireland have made sustained and largely successful efforts to place their findings within broader interpretative frameworks, whether this is the 'new' British history, Atlantic history or Irish interactions with Europe. Nevertheless, those who work on the period after the Union exhibit relatively little interest in moving beyond the well-established British–Irish context. This trend becomes even more apparent after 1921–2, when the focus becomes the separate and rarely integrated history of the two Irish states.⁹³ That is not to say that British–Irish relations after 1801 were not important, as clearly they were of tremendous significance in political and constitutional terms, but, rather, to suggest that a wide-angled perspective opens up all sorts of new possibilities for writing a different type of history of late modern Ireland. This would be inclusive, linking the diaspora with the homeland in what could emerge as a global history, charting the varied histories of the Irish wherever they may have ended up. The worldwide nature of this settlement requires a history of late modern Ireland that transcends the nation – be it post-Union or post-partition Ireland – as the primary unit of analysis, and which embraces more ambitious interpretative and conceptual frameworks. Historians working on British colonial and imperial history regularly use the term 'British world' to capture the diversity and geographical promiscuity of their subject matter. Perhaps it is time to speak similarly of an 'Irish world' or a 'greater Ireland' so as to connect the places in which the history of the Irish was played out.

The challenge of writing such a transnational history is that it demands knowledge of more than one national history, and requires an engagement with broader conceptual issues. In the past, crossing borders and, indeed, traversing continents did not pose insuperable difficulties. For instance, Fitzpatrick has recounted the story of Owen Mangan, born in County Cavan in the late 1830s, who first travelled to Lancashire in the early 1850s, then left for Philadelphia in the 1860s, subsequently moved to Fall River, Massachusetts, then eventually settled with his family in Rhode Island in 1870.⁹⁴ In the course of two decades, Mangan had lived in three countries and in at least twelve different locations. Clearly, he was an exceptionally mobile individual, though it was not unusual for the Irish to engage in a process of continuous migrations, following the opportunities wherever they might present themselves, and ignoring the borders of nation states. During the Californian gold rush of the early 1850s, many thousands of Irish seeking a

⁹² Maurice Bric, *Ireland, Philadelphia and the re-invention of America, 1760–1800* (Dublin, 2008); Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen & revolutionary America*; Michael Durey, *Transatlantic radicals and the early American republic* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1997); Marianne Elliott, *Partners in revolution: the United Irishmen and France* (London, 1982); Vincent Morley, *Irish opinion and the American revolution, 1760–1783* (Cambridge, 2002); Kevin Whelan, 'The green Atlantic: radical reciprocities between Ireland and America in the long eighteenth century' in Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *A new imperial history: culture, identity and modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge, 2004), pp 216–38; Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States*.

⁹³ The only fully integrated history is David Fitzpatrick, *The two Irelands, 1912–1939* (Oxford, 1998).

⁹⁴ Fitzpatrick, 'Emigration, 1801–70', p. 563.

fortune arrived not directly from Ireland but from the east coast of the U.S. and from Australasia in more or less equal proportions.⁹⁵ A century later, Irish workers in Britain engaged in multiple migrations back and forth across the Irish Sea, spending long periods at home, returning to England to pick up another job in a different location, and then moving on again. In the west of Ireland, as Miller has argued, more was known 'about Boston or New York than about Dublin, Cork, or even parts of their [migrants] own counties'.⁹⁶ To a politician, Church leader or other observer, the U.S. might well have seemed a foreign land, but for the Irish on the western seaboard it was 'their second native land'.⁹⁷ This continued on right throughout the twentieth century as places outside of Ireland loomed large in the popular consciousness. On his journey across the country in the mid-1950s, the German writer Heinrich Böll overheard on trains and at post offices scraps of conversations about London, Birmingham and other distant places.⁹⁸

Does thinking bigger result in the neglect of place – a fundamental element of historical analysis? Some of the finest studies of Irish migration and settlement investigate how places are connected through the movement of people; for example, John Mannion's detailed work on Inistioge migrants in Newfoundland, David Emmon's finely grained study of the Irish in Butte, Montana, or Bruce Elliott's painstaking reconstruction of the lives of Protestants from north Tipperary who settled in Canada in the first half of the nineteenth century all cleverly integrate the local with the national and transnational.⁹⁹ Moreover, the specific circumstances of a locality or region come into sharper focus, since the onus will be on exploring how context and the wider environment shaped the divergent life histories of those born in Ireland or were of Irish descent.

Where might the nation state fit within the history of the global Irish? There is a danger that in seeking to transcend the boundaries of the nation state, this might, inadvertently, create the sense of a history that pays little attention to differences between nations. Every nation state has its own specific history, and a transnational approach must take account of these differences rather than descending into generalities or broad sweeping statements about the experience of the diasporic Irish or the Irish 'people'. This integrated history is concerned with a series of interconnected sites linked through the movement of people, ideas and objects over time, with Ireland itself as one site – albeit an important one – among many others. Allowing for differentiation within each nation state, including Ireland, will obviate the real danger of presenting what could potentially be an homogenous picture that flattens out complexities. Paradoxical as it may seem, a necessary corollary of a transnational history of the global Irish is a sensitivity to specificity and context.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Campbell, *Ireland's new worlds*, pp 95–6; Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, p. 34

⁹⁶ Miller, *Emigrants & exiles*, p. 425.

⁹⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Quoted in Delaney, *Irish in post-war Britain*, p. 24.

⁹⁹ John Mannion and Fidela Maddock, 'Old world antecedents, New World adaptations: Inistioge immigrants in Newfoundland' in William Nolan and Kevin Whelan (eds), *Kilkenny: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1990), pp 345–404; Emmons, *Butte Irish*; Bruce S. Elliott, *Irish migrants in the Canadas: a new approach* (2nd ed., Montreal, 2002).

¹⁰⁰ Discussions with Kevin Kenny have helped clarify my thinking on this important point.

An example that illustrates this point is Irish Catholicism. There was an obvious global dimension to Irish Catholicism in terms of numbers and the formation of new congregations in many different places. Yet popular Catholicism in Ireland or, equally, in a host society such as the U.S., Britain or Australia was profoundly influenced by the specific context; for instance, did other ethnic groups form part of the membership of the congregation, what was the attitude towards Catholicism in the nation state, and who provided the leadership at a parish or diocesan level? Unlike Catholics in Ireland, who had little experience of confronting capitalism, Irish Catholics in the U.S. were forced to consider how to cope with the great social problems created by urbanisation and industrialisation. Irish Catholics in Britain had an altogether different set of issues to face: the challenge of a muscular anti-Catholicism until the late nineteenth century and an ecclesiastical leadership that displayed only contempt for the Irish poor.

Some subjects are more appropriate for transnational analysis. Social and cultural history lends itself readily to this form of inquiry since the movement of people and the transmission of ideas and cultures are the basic building blocks of transnational history, and this will challenge the traditional hegemony of high political and constitutional history in the writing on late modern Ireland. The infusion of ideas and methodologies from other historiographies will serve to nurture different lines of inquiry than those that currently predominate. There is a danger that the historiography of late modern Ireland is becoming self-referential and introspective through ever-more detailed investigations of the same subjects or the same people simply by accumulating additional layers of empirical evidence. Given the vast expanses of unexplored territory in the history of late modern Ireland, there is a compelling case for expanding the boundaries of historical writing beyond the relatively small list of well-worn and familiar topics. Only by doing so will it be possible to transform an ‘island story’ into a truly global one.

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